

January 5, 1997

Hi Dave,

Hope you had a good holiday. Thanks for the CD and a truly great letter.

It's great being able to hear you singing again though your music is somewhat different in some ways. I really like the intensity, particularly of the opening track (was trying for a similar feel on "Insignificant" on my album) and "Pamela" reminds me of your old stuff. "Wild Mt. Thyme" has long been one of my favorite songs--and I dig how you made it your own. (Ever hear Bob do it at Isle of Wight, it's like from Venus or something.)

You seem to have gotten deeper into some sort of traditional folk thing which I can definitely appreciate, but dig how you often have soft, yet screaming electric guitars like on "Hearing Your Call." But most of important of all, there's a very real feel to your music and of course I wouldn't have expected less of you.

Right now, I'm dealing with the fact that my album got mercilessly panned by some local critic asshole in today's (local) Sunday paper, so this may be a little more spaced that I want it to be (but been meaning to get back to you for weeks). All he could talk about was "can't take off the Dylan mask blah blah blah and that "running in the valley of the shadow death/gotta remember to hold my breath is an inane line." It was rather unbelievable. But the album is on the Americana chart (which is a radio thing for music like we play, so fuck him).

My album (in answer to your question) was recorded John Wesley Harding style with me on acoustic and bass and drums with other instruments added later. The vocals are all live (one word--which was wrong lyrically--punched in). Usually, I like to record totally live, but given the circumstance musicians I'd never played with, except for the drummer who's in my band (when I have a band) it was the only way to pull it off.

Of course, I remember that Boston trip (don't think I'll ever forget that). I managed to stay in touch with Van up through St. Dominic's Preview period. Lost touch after that, and was never able to regain it. One time he was here, he actually (seriously) asked me to be his road manager! I really didn't think I could handle all the junkies in his band and didn't say yes immediately, though it would've been a trip. A couple of years ago there was an interview in a magazine here with Larry Magid, head of Electric Factory Concerts which presented that Boston show. He talked about that show and how drunk Van was. He expounded it on it though and said they had to lock Van in his dressing room so he couldn't go out and get liquor. I certainly don't remember that, since the first thing that happened when we hit Boston other than Van jumping out of the way of some guy dressed as a bear or something (it was Halloween) was Van saying, "Where's the package store?" Another thing I remember was Danko refusing cocaine at the hotel (that *sure* changed), and asking Van if he played checkers--and of course having to dig into my pockets for change at the last tollbooth. What an insane night! My first (and I guess probably your) first taste of the big time.

I played a tiny bit back in Woodstock. I was just learning and it was more than a little intimidating to try and play around you guys (especially my brother). The only time I ever remember playing was one time Ken Lauber was over jamming, and I did "Tom Thumb's Blues" '66 style.

Do you ever listen to Dylan any more. Thought about you a lot when all that Christian shit went down cause back around John Wesley Harding time and when the Basement Tapes came out, we had some talks around the Columbia campus about all that religious imagery (T-boned and punctured, and "Thief" in relation to Christ etc.) Have you ever heard "Sign on The Cross" from the Basement Tapes? Pretty spooky. Anyway, when Slow Train came out, I wasn't all that surprised 'cause I'd expected it after John Wesley Harding. I also remember you showing me this paper Norman had written on Dylan and time and space. At the time, it didn't make sense, but later on when Blood on the Tracks came out and Dylan would actually talk about time, space and writing in a couple of interviews I thought about that paper a lot.

Anyway, I'm considering playing your album for the guy at my company (he *is* the company)--I think he'd like it. But I'd want to tell you more about the company and what to expect first.

In any case, take care, have a great year, and please stay in touch. Let me know if you come East, and I'll let you know if I come West.